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38TH SESSION OF THE SUB-COMMISSION ON THE PREVENTION OF DISCRIMINATION AND PROTECTION OF MINORITIES

Statement by the Portuguese Delegation
under Item 6 of the Agenda

Geneva, 26th August 1985

Madame Chairman,

The Portuguese Delegation has been following with attention the debate on Item 6 of the Agenda, specially the references that were made to the question of East Timor by the distinguished members of the Sub-Commission Mr.Whitaker and Monsieur Bossuyt, the distinguished delegates of "Pax Romana" and "Pax Christi" and by the distinguished observer of Indonesia.

The consideration that the Sub-Commission has been paying to this question since 1982 reflects naturally the concern that the international community has attached these last years to the humanitarian situation in a territory so isolated. This international interest has contributed to some positive signs showing a certain improvement of the living conditions of the timorese during the last year. In our view these developments are welcomed and should be encouraged. They represent a step forward but they are not yet enough to meet all our concerns.

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In fact we cannot ignore the references that were made to a persistance of human rights violations.

Madame Chairman,

May I be permitted to refer now to practices that restrain the enjoyment of fundamental human rights by the East timorese. The resettlement of large strata of the population in new villages cannot only be explained by security reasons, specially when these have no freedom of circulation outside their villages without a special permission grantes by the police authority. There are still reports of limitations on the freedom of circulation of members of local clergy in the normal course of their apostolate. On the other hand we consider that despite the visits of members of Parliament, diplomats and journalists to East Timor, that have occured since the last year, the access to the territory is still not free and the exchange of communication, whether by mail or by telephone, is subject to a strict censorship and tight control by local authorities.

Some references were made to the role of the ICRC in East Timor. My delegation has emphasized in previous sessions of the Sub-Commission as well as before the

Commission on Human Rights the important and useful task that the International Committee of the Red Cross could fullfil in that territory due to its humanitarian and impartial character. Despite the enlargement of the ICRC action in East Timor during the last year, we would appreciate an extension of its protection activities, namely through the regular access of ICRC delegates to all the prisons where timorese are detained. A practical way to verify the neutral nature of the administration of justice in East Timor would be the regular attendance by ICRC delegates to the judgement of any person subjected to detention or imprisonment. We hope this procedure will be adopted.

Madame Chairman,

Another matter of concern to my Government is the preservation of the ethnic, cultural and religious identity of the timorese people. Regarding the references that we have heard related to an improvement of the economic situation of the territory we must observe that any policy in that field should bear in mind the social reality and the respect of the cultural patterns and religious beliefs of their population, who contitutes a minority in the region. The rights of this minority should be respected. This is a subject that in our view deserves the attention of the of the distinguished members of the Sub-Commission.

Madame Chairman,

The remarks that my delegation has made reflect the concern of the Portuguese Authorities on the question of East Timor. Portugal as the administering power will not spare any effort to the successful accomplishment of the mandate which has been entrusted to the Secretary--General under the United Nations General Assembly Resolution 37/30. We hope that the mediation of the Secretary-General will lead soon to a comprehensive settlement of the problem. From our side this solution lies on the full respect for human rights in the territory and the recognition of the dignity of the timorese people. To attain this objective we should bear in mind that ten years have already passed since the beginning of the conflict and that there has been already an enormous number of lives lost. Therefore it is fundamental that the parties concerned will establish a climate of mutual confidence, a condition we deem essential for the achievement of a peaceful solution and for a reconciliation in East Timor.

I thank you, Madame Chairman.